

[I Got an American Spine]

Beliefs and Customs - Folkstuff

2. I GOT AN AMERICAN SPINE WITH A HEART FROM THE OLD WORLD

"What will you say and where will you turn? What will you do? What will you do? What will you do?"

(An aging Bronx Jew whom unemployment has robbed of status as father, husband, lover and breadwinner. He married young and worked hard, filling his household with squawks and rages, although fulfilling all his duties and satisfying all his appetites. When his wife took over his place as breadwinner, he embarked on a frustrated career as vagabond. Now he finds he hasn't either the health or inclination. He is only a tired old man. His narrow brown eyes are inflamed, and his lips, although still thick and red, smack with an empty hopeless sound as he talks.) [In -5/10/39?]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview [4 opies?]

FORM A Circumstances of Interview [400 Words?] [Sistedor D. A. State?] [2?]

STATE

NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 557 West 144 Street

Library of Congress

DATE May 10, 1939

SUBJECT UNEMPLOYED FRINGE

1. Date and time of interview

April 25, 1939

2. Place of interview

Madison Square Park

3. Name and address of informant

Anonymous

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE

NAME OF WORKER Herman Partnow

Library of Congress

ADDRESS 557 West 144 Street

DATE May 10, 1939

SUBJECT I GOT AN AMERICAN SPINE WITH A HEART [?] FROM THE OLD WORLD

AN AMERICAN SPINE WITH A HEART [?] FROM THE OLD WORLD.

Go hang yourself with your own necktie. When I'm fifty years, an old man. I'm strolling around with my hands in my pockets. I'm suddenly a vagabond. I'm telling you I got specks [in front of?] my eyes. (I'm screaming in my sleep) I ain't human no more.

After all, human nature is four things, ain't it? Clothing, food, shelter and recreation. In the morning you wake up, the first thing you put on your clothes, the second the belly starts in to talk, so you gotta eat. The third thing you want recreation. So you get tired out, then you gotta lay down. But where is the bed? We ain't animals, they can sleep in a hole ground, nature gave them their own clothing. [We ain't talking*1] about About insects *1 neither - bedbugs and mosquitoes - their whole life is recreation.

What shall I do? I'm screaming in my sleep like my pappa, may [he rest in peace?] I ain't a tub of wisdom, I'm a plain old man, I got an American spine with a heart from [the old world.?] Like they say around here, I ain't a thoroughbred. Suddenly it's a different world. Yesterday I'm sure a thing is wrong, today somebody is doing it. So If somebody is doing it already, it can't be wrong? # I'm/ completely turned around. I'm a not, a N-O-T. It's the world of the doughnut and the hot dog. Nothing balances. # An old man was asking them for 2 a blanket last week . I saw it with my own eyes, they sent him to the hospital. First they kill you, then they are putting a pillow under your head.

Look, my face. Such a face you don't get laying in the lap of lady luck. It's three years already - I come home three o'clock in the morning the kids are in bed but my wife she's dressed up to kill. Sarah, what's the matter? I [?] ask. She says: I'm going out. What out? I

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say. In the middle of the night, out? Go to bed, Sarah. She says: You go to bed, I'm going out. So a whole month I worried and complained and talked and finally she threw me out [??] of the house altogether. What could I do? It was her property, I was depending on her. [Twenty six ?????] I was no more a man, you understand, I not human, so she threw me out , twenty six years we were married The Bible tells you when Abraham was an old man the people , they sent him in a young girl she should make him young again. But am I Abraham they should do this with me? Impossible! Go get born all over again!

A question: was I really born? Or Maybe God dropped me through a hole in the sky and I ain't born yet. Dead I ain't neither. I'm like stuck in a sewer [?] pipe. I'm in it, I'm stuffing it up and they're pushing me down in the river, the East River or the Hudson River, I got no choice.

Back I can't go. [?] It's too late. Like yesterday - I was standing on the breadline. Was it yesterday? What is it today? Tuesday? That's right, yesterday. I was 3 standing there and suddenly a cop hollers: Back up. Two hundred people on the line, he says to them back up. So he started in to shove, in two minutes there was a fight with three broken heads. You can't back up no more. [?] one One thing I'm finished with living and lyin', like they say here. The whole life [?] it's like a cough, and when you're living it's like sucking [?] cough drops - it don't help the poor people. And/ of course the rich [?] people nothing helps no more - it's like a lot of pigs eating pigs' knuckles. [I wish only I was a woman, I wouldn't starve. I meant it?] What can I do? I got an AMERICAN spine but with a heart from the old world.

The only thing it's a good God, a wise God, he won't let me live long. That's all.